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ABSTRACT

Interview data were obtained from teachers, principals, and parents of children with special needs, as well as from supervisors and executive officers of parent advocacy and/or provider groups, to study the Bronx, New York, Special Education Regional Office (BRO). Three program areas were investigated: management, communications and liaison, and program development and supervision. Among findings were that BRO appears to utilize its resources to obtain accurate student data and to maintain constant audits of class attendance; that BRO is aggressive in moving classes, in consolidating classes, obtaining and using adequate space in school buildings, and in general, in fighting to bring more resources to the Bronx; and that where direct comparisons were made the BRO performed better than the still largely centralized Bureaus. Findings led to a proposal that the Division of Special Education, functioning through field offices, become the financier, auditory, advocate, and standards developer for children with special needs while local districts be charged with the responsibilities for day-to-day operations of programs for all children including those with special needs. (SBH)

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EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:
A Study of Their Delivery and Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, an ever-widening community has come to recognize the increased importance of the issues surrounding the education of handicapped children. Although these issues concern school districts and municipalities in every state, New York City's situation is particularly dramatic.

-- There are some fifty thousand handicapped children being served; not only is that a larger number than ever before but also there is a higher percentage of children who are severely and multiply handicapped.

-- At the same time, tens of thousands of children remain unserved; indeed, there may be as many unserved as are presently being served.

-- Landmark federal legislation, P.L. 94-142 ("The Education of All Handicapped Children Act"), has raised both expectations and demands, neither adequately answered.

-- Parents, their organizations, and advocates for the children (and the three are not the same) are each growing increasingly impatient at what they perceive as the slow and often erratic pace of changes in the system to meet the children's needs.

All this confronts a school system with declining enrollments, in a city facing growing fiscal constraints, and with a new Chancellor committed to change, fast.

It was in the context of these conditions that we undertook at the behest of Chancellor Frank J. Macchiarola a study of the Bronx Special

Education Regional Office (BRO). Our mandate from the Chancellor directed us to look not at the BRO in isolation but at a comparison of the BRO and of special education units organized under the central administration. We will report on these comparisons, but we also will review special education from a larger perspective and make recommendations based on that analysis and perspective.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BRONX REGIONAL OFFICE

Begun in October, 1977, the BRO was established as a "pilot project" providing an alternative model for the management and supervision of special education services. With the exception of children with hearing, visual and speech impairing conditions, the delivery of services in the Bronx is organized differently from the rest of New York City. In the Bronx a single management team is responsible for organizing the total effort* to deliver services, while in the other boroughs DSEPPS** bureaus are responsible for delivering services to children whose handicapping condition is "compatible" with the goals and functions of the particular bureau.

The Regional Office includes a child advocate, a placement unit, a transportation unit, supervisors, teacher aides, paraprofessionals, three assistant directors, and two administrative assistants. The director of

*As the BRO is not responsible for the evaluation and assessment, which is done by the Committees on the Handicapped and the Evaluation Units (COH/EUs), our study did not address itself to such issues.

**During the period of this study, the Division of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services; (DSEPPS) was split in two, establishing a Division of Special Education and Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services; to keep the historical record accurate, we will use the DSEPPS formulation, for such it was for the activities we studied.

the office is responsible for the management of ESEA Title I funds, and at the present time, manages but does not control the tax levy allocations to the Bronx. The scope of responsibilities includes programs at the elementary school, junior high school and high school level as well as in hospitals, multiple handicap centers, off-site drug centers, Occupational Training Centers, and Adult Skills Training Centers.

The three major functions of the Bronx Special Education Regional Office (BRO) are management of resources, liaison-communication, and personnel and program development. Among the management functions, the BRO arranges for transportation of special education students, acquires and monitors available space in schools, assigns students to special education classes within the programs recommended by Committees on the Handicapped, and monitors program implementation.

Communication functions of the BRO include relating directly to the community school district superintendents in the Bronx and to the Bronx superintendent of the High School Division, to borough agencies and advocacy groups for special education, and to DSEPPS. Supervisors from the BRO relate directly to school principals and special educational personnel located in the schools. Personnel in the BRO also interact with local colleges and universities to facilitate staff development programs for supervisors and teachers.

Personnel and program development occur at the school level through activities of supervisors and teacher trainers and at the regional level where BRO staff and university programs are organized for the training of supervisors, teachers, and administrators.

THE STUDY OF THE BRONX REGIONAL OFFICE

The study was conducted from September through December, 1978. Interview data were obtained from teachers, principals and parents of children with special needs, selected at random, from twenty-five schools in all six districts in the Bronx, seven schools from two districts in Brooklyn and seven schools from two districts in Queens. In addition, we interviewed the six Bronx Community School District Superintendents (or their designees), the Bronx High School Superintendent, the Superintendents in the four community school districts in Brooklyn and Queens, the executive officers of 24 parent advocacy and/or provider groups, all of the supervisors in the Bronx and ten in Brooklyn and Queens, the senior officials and Bureau Chiefs at DSEPPS. Questionnaire responses were obtained from special education teachers, contact teachers, and supervisors in all 39 schools randomly selected for study. In total, over 300 persons were interviewed.

MANAGEMENT

There is some evidence* that suggests that the BRO has been successful in a management sense but it probably is too soon to make predictions about programmatic and training aspects of BRO operations. Concerning transportation, there is a general impression among persons both at DSEPPS and the BRO that the BRO has led to improvements, yet, the data we collected suggest that this may be more a function of perception that reality. In managing space and maintaining full class registers, the BRO appears to be more energetic, to maintain better records (as it does in other areas as

*The full document includes reports based on the more than 300 interviews in both text and 21 tables.

well), and to perform more effectively than does DSEPPS and its Bureaus in the other four boroughs. So, too, the BRO appears to be more imaginative in the deployment of professional staff; in part, this is a function of the greater range of resources it has as compared with a single Bureau. However, overshadowing this distinction is the lack of support personnel throughout the service system. While the BRO appears to manage some activities more effectively -- and it collects more accurate and timely information about all aspects of the program for which it is responsible, our data do not show a general across the board significant difference in management.

COMMUNICATIONS AND LIAISON

There are serious deficits in communications and liaison between the BRO and DSEPPS central administrative offices and between the Bureaus and the BRO. No doubt, some of this is due to a reaction to a "new kid on the block", some due to the Bureau's historic incapacity to communicate to those outside as well as their antipathy to new (Non-Bureau) programs, and some due to issues of personalities; the net result, nonetheless, is for less than adequate or open communication. To turn to communications and liaison between the BRO and those in the Bronx, in general the reports indicate that the higher the formal status of the individuals, the more favorably they rated the BRO in these areas. Thus, community school district superintendents generally found the BRO responsive; they liked having a single place, within the borough, to call. In all three boroughs studied (Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens), principals reported that they have not participated in discussions with DSEPPS Bureaus or BRO staff about special education curriculum, program development or cross-categorical

teaching. And, throughout the system articulation between the various grade levels is poor. In the Bronx, the BRO has been working energetically on this in the interface between junior and senior high school.

As with the principals, teachers in all three boroughs reported that they were not involved in decisions involving cross-categorical teaching, new curriculum development, or moving of special education programs. And there was no difference, comparing the Bronx with the other two boroughs, in teachers' reports as to assistance they received in working with parents. Similarly, there were no significant overall differences in the experience with the BRO as compared with DSEPPS central in the reports of parent and advocacy groups which operate citywide or those with local affiliates in the Bronx and in the other boroughs.

Union officials find the BRO to be communicative and responsive to teachers. However, organizational constraints help to maintain distance between special education teachers and regular teachers. The fact that special education classes are supervised and funded differently and have different schedules creates barriers between regular and special education teachers. Teachers reported that feelings of separateness are reduced in schools where the principal is supportive of special education. Interviews with teachers also revealed that they do not have input in programmatic decisions except for student articulation and that they were very concerned about the lack of communication between the parents and the school. Parents who were interviewed said that they communicate with their child's teacher on a regular basis.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND SUPERVISION

Program development is neglected throughout DSEPPS. For the most

part, although there are exceptions, there is little curriculum development. In the Bronx, there is attention to programs in the high schools and concern for cross-categorical teaching.

Supervisors were moved from DSEPPS headquarters to the Bronx in the fall of 1977 and to the other four boroughs in the fall of 1978. This move "to the field" and the concommitant new pattern of supervision ("cross-categorical" in the Bronx and "horizontal/vertical" in the other boroughs) appears to be working better in the Bronx than in the other boroughs. Clearly, a part of this is a function of the longer period of time the change has been in operation in the Bronx. But there appears to be more than that. Planning for the shift appears to have been done more expertly in the Bronx and consequent disruption less; of course, we are relying on memories of the Bronx experience while the experience in the other boroughs is immediate. Also, the change in the Bronx involved only one borough and a score of supervisors while the change this year involved four boroughs and nearly a hundred persons. Nonetheless, it appears that the change in the pattern of supervision has been better handled, better organized, and more closely supervised in the Bronx. An additional factor affecting the change in the Bronx is that with the BRO the supervisors have a strong administrative layer between them and the Bureaus.

Despite improvements in the organization of supervision, both comparing 1978 with 1976 citywide and the Bronx with Brooklyn/Queens in 1978, in all three boroughs teachers rely less on supervisors, receive slower responses from them, and value less highly their help than they do that of principals or "other" personnel located more closely to them. In other words, while the organization of supervisors in the Bronx appears to be

superior to that in the other two boroughs studied, the services of personnel other than the supervisor are valued more highly in all three boroughs. And concerning services to teachers, there is no difference between the Bronx and Brooklyn/Queens. Nor does there appear to be any difference in teachers' perceptions of supervision from those in their discipline versus those from another area ("cross-categorical" supervision).

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS ON BRO

Analysis of the data suggests that the BRO is an energetic, aggressive, management-oriented organization. As is true of new organizations with strong leadership, the BRO has a sense of mission and esprit. It appears to utilize its resources to obtain accurate student data and to maintain constant audits on class attendance. It is very aggressive in moving classes, in consolidating classes, obtaining and using adequate space in school buildings, and, in general, in fighting hard to bring more resources to the Bronx. While the data are tenuous and the differences often marginal, on most issues where direct comparisons were made the BRO performed better than the still largely centralized Bureaus. Indeed, steps taken by DSEPPS leadership in the past six months, many of which were strong and praiseworthy, indicate the recognition that a centralized system cannot work. In sum, the Bronx Special Education Regional Office is in most ways simply a variation, although an improvement on the current system.

THE LARGER PERSPECTIVE

Given its own way it is likely that the system will grow, that more

and more children will be identified and placed in whatever program is currently in fashion and approximates the identified impairing condition of the child. There is little question that DSEPPS is too large as it currently exists and given its own head would move towards more decentralization of "its" personnel.

There is a real danger, however; it is likely, that over time, a set of regional systems will develop their own hierarchies and Bureaus, create a series of autonomous systems, and become even more inaccessible to non-region persons than the present system is. As a Washington observer noted, "Instead of one '110', you will have five!" In a time of fiscal restraint such efforts could prove disastrous.

But beyond issues of organization and management, we do not see an impetus in the regional system to move closer to a program which emphasizes placements in the least restrictive environment and programs which operate so as to bring children together. While to a considerable extent the Bronx Special Education Regional Office is better at what it does than the present central organization (or, more accurately than the previous central organization), neither it nor the centralized system are designed to meet the increased demands of serving more children in appropriate educational settings providing the least restrictive environment.

What concerns us is the seeming lack of a thrust in DSEPPS or the BRO towards developing programs which honor the federal law or state regulations requiring appropriate placement in the least restrictive environment, and a lack of a thrust toward working cooperatively with teachers of the mainstream to help them develop techniques for working with children with special needs. We found little evidence of efforts on the part of DSEPPS, or local districts, to develop diagnostic and prescriptive programs at the

earliest years in an attempt to maintain and support children as they cope with their handicapping conditions. Although some children will need the support of a protected self-contained classroom, we are not sanguine about a system which finds it necessary to place (on an all but permanent basis) so many of its children in this type of environment. We did see evidence of innovative moves toward early diagnosis, or early prescriptive programs, of support services designed to help children with mild conditions, but these were more often the efforts of individuals supported by principals and/or district superintendents than the efforts of DSEPPS and its Bureaus. We also saw evidence of innovative programs and of alternative strategies designed by individuals in DSEPPS Bureaus, but almost always these were designed for children who had already been identified and placed in a specific category (e.g., CRMD, emotionally handicapped, brain injured, etc.). These program designs typically maintained and supported children in separate programs.

A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

A new conceptual framework must be developed for educating children with special needs. We need to divert the energy, vitality, and wisdom of special education professionals from giving first priority and attention to developing categorical programs to developing programs which have as fundamental grounding support for children to be maintained in the regular programs. And structure and organization must build from and be supportive of such a perspective.

Our proposal is based on a number of fundamental assumptions and objectives which are explicit in the structure recommended. As one assesses the proposal, however, the reader should be aware that the structure

we suggest is only one of many that could be designed to serve the same purposes. We are certain, however, that the goals to which we ascribe -- and which we believe both the law and sound educational practice demand -- cannot be achieved by the current special education delivery system in New York City, or by tinkering with it in terms of management structures (viz., the BRO) or patterns of supervision (viz., the new design in the other four boroughs).

Our proposals seek to facilitate the integration of children with special needs into a changed mainstream and to heighten the concern for their education at the local district level. We believe that New York City is currently operating "dual" systems and that present administrative arrangements, be they DSEPTS operated or regionally based, support and facilitate this dualism.

Therefore, we propose that the Division of Special Education, functioning through field offices, become the financier, auditor, advocate, and standards developer for children with special needs while local districts be charged with the responsibilities of day-to-day operations of programs for all children including those with special needs. Furthermore, we recommend that heavy emphasis in every school be placed on early screening of all children, the development of resource room programs and flexible support staff utilization patterns. Only those children with profound and/or severe handicaps, who cannot profit from "regular" classroom placement, including programs of in-class and out-of-class support services, would be sent to special placements in a "hub" school in their own communities. Only in the instance of low-incidence programs would students be sent across district lines.

Our proposal sets forth a plan which neither retains the current centralized system with its limited outstationing of personnel nor does it recommend decentralization. Rather, it recognizes the unique nature of education for children with special needs, the history of (lack of adequate) programs for such children, and the demands of state and federal regulation and law. It proposes a design which focuses operational responsibility at the point of service delivery while at the same time it places overall authority at a central level. It would produce a system leaner at the top and fuller at the point of services to children. It would establish a system capable of providing appropriate and effective services to children while being organized in a way to assure effective, prudent and efficient management.

The swelling demand for equal educational opportunity for those with handicapping conditions has become a virtual tidal wave. New York City, the largest school district in the United States, faces this deluge with a system that is bureaucratically organized and oriented toward self-contained, categorical programs. Mandates for placement in the "most appropriate, least restrictive environment" are in contradistinction to the direction of the current DSEPPS programs. Compounding the problems of fiscal exigency and diminishing resources is the fact that large systems typically build resistance to change into their structures.

The reality of the present system must be placed against the language, intent and vision of P.L. 94-142 and State mandates. As this study of the operations of the Division of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services and the Bronx Special Education Regional Office (BRO) progressed, it became apparent that the people of DSEPPS, in the Bronx and elsewhere, are

professionally concerned, vital, and highly motivated to provide the best educational experiences for youth with special needs. These are caring, and in the main, skillful people working against terrible odds. And yet, we were struck by the insularity of the system; at its inward thrust to maintain and sustain itself. It appeared as a system content to be side by side with the majority system (it asks only for more resources to maintain itself), it orients itself toward moving children from the mainstream and sustaining them in self-contained special classes (we found little evidence that many children return to the "mainstream" after placements); and even its perturbations (i.e., the BRO or "horizontal/vertical" supervision or field-based supervisors) seem designed to support the current system rather than to change it. Further, data on assignment of children to programs indicate disproportionate distributions with non-whites over-represented among the emotionally handicapped and whites over-represented among the physically handicapped.

The essence of the program should be early emphasis on remediation of mild handicapping conditions. This would be approached through a variety of models including readiness programs, resource room programs, in-class supports and other such programs designed to support children in kindergarten through grades 2 in their own schools. While all children would receive supports as needed, the object of early intervention would be to reduce the number of children who later on require special class placement. Such a design can be carried through best in a system which emphasizes the building focus for programs.

It is not too much to suggest that what New York City does for its children with special needs may well spell the success or failure nation-

wide of P.L. 94-142, "The Education for All Handicapped Children Act." We believe that the system we propose would improve the education of all children by providing a consistent, single school system devoted to educating all children in terms of their special needs. Attention to the early grades, classroom-based diagnosis, emphasis on remediation (where necessary) at the earliest point, building-based supports, close involvement of parents, and strong leadership from the principal are key features in a program for all children.

We need to commit ourselves to long range changes that will enable the New York City public education system to use its resources in those ways that will satisfy the demands of a democratic nation, that is, a literate and educated populace without regard to race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. As Ronald Edmonds, the Chancellor's senior assistant for curriculum and instruction, said in a talk before the National Teacher Corps in 1978,

> We can whenever, and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need, to do what I just said. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

We believe that children with special needs are included among those whose schooling should be of interest to us. Now our imagination and perseverance must match our interest.